

## Introduction

This book is based on my long term practice and research interests in older people from a range of perspectives, given that I have been working in the field for almost 30 years initially as a nurse, a social worker and then later on in my career, as a manager of older people's services and subsequently as an educator and researcher. Since the 1990's, we have been acutely focused on the implications of a fast-growing global aging population (Kirkwood and Cooper, 2014). Coexisting with concerns about this 'demographic time bomb' particularly in relation to the economic consequences of global ageing, there has been a growing appreciation of the importance of looking positively at the implications of the ongoing lengthening of human life expectancy. There are imperatives for those working alongside older people to challenge any highly blinkered perceptions by identifying opportunities and potential for wellbeing in all its aspects across this very significant era within the life course (Cooper, 2014). Within social work and social care, a key threat to wellbeing in later life is perceived by many to be the loss of independence and this often presents as the bread and butter of social work and social care professionals. Responding to the challenge of ageing and creating positive communities in which older people who can live well will involve a long process of engaging with change in a way that demands innovative thinking, creative solutions and fresh approaches to the reshaping of our public services and design of care environments particularly within very dynamic economic, social and political circumstances. Within the UK and Europe in particular, government legislation and policies concerned with demography have asserted a paradigmatic shift towards the increased engagement of older people with public services. Supporting their inclusion within their communities and ensuring high quality provision through a motivated and skilled workforce are the cornerstones to ensuring wellbeing in all stages and situations within the life course. Further, the highly valued philosophy of user involvement and values underpinning co-production

within these contexts has become integral to finding practical ways in which to improve the wellbeing of older people and their experiences of ageing well. This transformational agenda requires that both older people and those supporting them are playing an active part.

### **Key concepts behind this book**

There are already a number of key quality texts on how to work effectively with older people using social care (McDonald, 2010, Ray and Phillips, 2012, Lynch, 2015 and many more) and there are also a range of books emerging which focus on learning in later life (Withnall, 2010; Finsden and Formosa, 2011). This book intends to present a unique perspective by writing about learning in later life from a social work and social care lens as well as inviting those writing in the field of gerontology and specifically educational gerontology field to become an audience of these ideas. I have aimed to complement those texts by focusing on the specific contribution of lifelong learning within an evolving paradigm. Disciplines within lifelong learning and education, particularly what is termed as ‘educational gerontology’ (the study and practice of education for and about older adults), have given rise to debates about the purpose and meaning of learning in later life. Whilst this area has been steadily emerging within the educational field in relation to the lifelong learning of *older* people, this has mainly focused on the skills and knowledge required to support the continuing employment and skills of those both pre and post retirement (Soulsby, 2014). Examples include the development of initiatives around volunteering, and on the work of organisations such as the University of the Third Age (U3A). There has been a relative under-theorization and a lack of empirical research however into the lifelong learning needs, opportunities and experiences of those older people using social care who are typically marginalized from these debates and developments. This book attempts to address this gap by paying specific attention to examining what opportunities might be present within care services and public services in general for older people using social care to capitalize on the skills and knowledge they might

need to achieve more person-centred support. Throughout each chapter I have aimed to develop a debate and argument for the convergence of the lifelong learning agenda with social policy and social care which has great potential by increasing interrelated and overlapping activity in both future policy and practice. As each chapter develops, I will be making the core argument that points to the challenge of sustainability of the care and support of older people and how social care should engage more meaningfully with concepts such as social capital and the challenges associated with achieving a genuine co-productive approach towards the quality of experience of older people using social care. This is a relatively unfamiliar approach to social work and social care and I hope to provide some convincing argument and evidence to not only support these ideas, but to also facilitate debate through the examination of issues and themes concerning learning in later life. I will be drawing on many excellent examples from providers of services where learning has been used to promote wellbeing and user involvement as well as from my own research and evaluation activities.

In short, this book will build towards developing a sound and detailed theoretical basis from which our work with older people can be enriched. Social work and social care has a tradition of engaging with social theory in its analysis of social problems. Social theory offers a description of a broad range of philosophical, economic, historical, linguistic, socio-psychological and literary arguments generated by Western scholars in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries in response to the period of social history known as modernity and postmodernity. According to Dressman (2008), social theory also offers a critique of institutions, the social order and the diversity and creativity of its multiple perspectives, and its argumentative or agonistic *modus operandi*. Therefore I will be drawing on relevant disciplines such as critical social policy and sociology; psychology; educational gerontology and theories of participation, user involvement and co-production in later life. Some of the ideas in this book also draw on the work of Habermas (1981, 1984, 1987) whose

paradigms of strategy-oriented and identity-oriented analysis are embedded in his theory of communicative action. This provides an overarching theoretical framework for explaining structural constraints and tensions arising from policy imperatives for achieving transformation within older people's services. Habermas's critical and emancipatory ideas on knowledge (1968) have been used in some chapters to inform the way in which older people are worked with individually within social care when using learning interventions. By developing a theoretical framework, the latter chapters of the book will be more practice oriented and some will draw on my own research findings and project work to illustrate how I have actively developed, evaluated and researched the effectiveness of social pedagogy and lifelong learning through social work with older people. Two of the books chapters for instance will specifically provide real life case studies to illustrate how this has worked in different areas of social care including contributions from other researchers engaged in this type of work. Through this process I hope that you will be able to gain relevant insight and draw on some of the guidance offered in a purposeful way and you are encouraged to use more radical approaches with older people to facilitate greater engagement with those working in care services using lifelong learning and education.

It is important for social work and social care as well as gerontologists that we grapple with the voices of older people themselves to illustrate the sophistication of their desires around the themes of independence, dependence and interdependence within this agenda and this is illustrated in the research case studies included. For example, I argue that we can operationalize the concepts of lifelong learning by examining the types of learning opportunities that could be promoted through effective brokerage of appropriate services and by using a relationship based approach (Hafford-Letchfield 2010, 2014). Problematisation of concepts around self-directed support and increased participation within social care suggests that the potential for empowerment of older people in their relationships with care

professionals might be enhanced through engaging with a range of pedagogies. Finally the main purpose of this book is to find mechanisms in care settings that engage with learning in a way that will improve the quality of responses to older people's support needs. This has challenges for some of the wider issues such as the training and education of social workers and the social care workforce as well; as the challenges in researching and evaluating the role of lifelong learning to demonstrate transformational change.

## **Chapter Synopses**

We will start in **chapter one** by taking a broad overview of some of the academic disciplines and key theories associated with the concept of 'learning' and how ideas about learning reflect what society at a given time thinks about education during the lifecourse; about the relationship between the individual and society, and how these ideas connect with those working with marginalised populations. In this chapter we pay particular attention to three relevant frameworks of learning which lay the foundations for the topics in subsequent chapters. This includes an overview of the ideas of Paulo Freire on critical social pedagogy; the concept of transformational learning and the contribution of social pedagogy which embodies a holistic approach to person centred care.

**Chapter two** will provide an overview of the policy landscape relating to the key issues and challenges of changing demography and future development of services. We will take a critical approach to considering specific policy areas particularly in the UK said to reflect and serve the interest of older people using social care. The critical commentary within this chapter seeks to combine instrumental and philosophical aspects of policy and highlights some challenging issues by drawing on assumptions made by policy and how it shapes the way society sees later life; older people's potential for learning and the spaces that might be created within social care for which to 'age well'. Chapter two argues that tensions between

policy rhetoric relating to older people, the experiences of ageing and the realities of using social care services provide an interesting focus for exploration.

**Chapter three** explores the specific policy background on lifelong learning from a European and UK perspective and some of the key concepts around how learning is recognised and transferable to discourse about the ageing society. This chapter argues that older people constitute a marginalised sector in the EU's lifelong learning policy. Preoccupation with short-term economic concerns tends to override opportunities for raising the quality of learning opportunities and the role of community, informal, and self-directed learning for increasing active citizenship and social inclusion and this chapter looks at some of the initiatives and significant documents foregrounding these developments.

In **chapter four**, we explore key theoretical themes in relation to education and learning in later life a build on the emancipatory theories of education and learning introduced in chapter one. The chapter specifically explores the contribution of educational gerontology and its key theories and will draw out the parallels with the aims of social work and social care with older people. Three main areas will be explored for synthesis; challenging ageism,; counteracting blame cultures around the perceived burden of ageing on welfare and the value of accumulated experiences in later life. The latter part of this chapter will be given to the critical paradigm of learning in later life known as critical educational gerontology which researches the nature of participation and provision of learning within the political economic context. We will pay closer attention to issues of diversity, difference and disadvantage through the work of critical gerontologists. This chapter will also engage with critical theory such as Foucault and Habermas to contribute insights into the way older peoples experience is structured and to the reframing of practice with older people to establish a more ethical relationship, democratic communication and participative citizenship. It will examine how

learning is a significant vehicle to facilitate interactions between the policy and political sphere with informal everyday relationships with older people in practice.

**Chapter five** seeks to provide a framework within which the concept of learning might be developed in practice and draws on UNESCO's (1997) four pillars of learning that older people might meet through strategies developed in tune with enhancing user involvement, participation and the engagement of older people in social care. Given that learning is a complex social and value-creating activity, and one that is shaped by, and that shapes social structure and culture that involves ethical judgements and political choices, we will also look to some empirical evidence and issues that arise from taking these forward within the social care arena and these are the main topics in chapters six and seven.

**Chapter six** actively illustrates the issues from chapter five in practice and reports on findings from a qualitative study of the learning opportunities and learning experiences of older people in two different locations in England, UK. Using in-depth qualitative interviews with twenty individual older people using social care in their own homes, it explores from the perspectives of service users themselves, how they experienced opportunities for participation, involvement and learning in the process of accessing and using social care services. This empirical based chapter identifies the type of skills or knowledge needed by the older people participating in order to capitalise on opportunities to direct their own care and experience personalised support and reflects on some of the key themes discussed so far in the book.

**Chapter seven** outlines two case studies from my own practice and research to illustrate the impact of lifelong learning in practice. The first is an intergenerational project developed in partnership between a social work degree program and an Older People's Theatre group using the arts to explore the topic of intimacy and sexuality in later life. Formal evaluation

identified beneficial outcomes for participants highlighting the advantages of older people's leadership in social work education and the transformative potential of the dramatic learning methods used. The second case study is based on an evaluation of outcomes from a community project where comedy activities were introduced into a day centre for older people with dementia as a result of a partnership between the day centre; a local university and a specialist comedy provider. Four workshops were provided using improvisatory activities and comedy, as a medium to engage older people in reflecting on aspects of their care environment. The evaluation demonstrated some additional outcomes for those involved and highlighted the benefits of laughter and fun in promoting a positive climate and the learning potential of older people with dementia. Both of these examples illustrate the value of intergenerational learning in social care contexts and the reciprocity and contribution of older people within this.

**Chapter eight** reflects on some of the challenges in evaluating and researching lifelong learning and the need to strengthen the evidence base which engages with multi-sector perspectives to connect with the policy themes on wellbeing and ageing. We will be looking through the lens of social theory within educational research to consider what enables and facilitates these relationships and the barriers to integration in developing more holistic responses to effective provision for older people. The main focus of this chapter is on the use of discourse theory based on a relevant example of documentary analysis of two key policies impacting on learning and social care. The analysis of these relevant policy documents will help to enrich our understanding of whose voices and competing interests are present in this research arena. This brings together some of the themes from earlier discussion concerning the influence of policies in learning and social care and from the reported empirical qualitative research with older people in chapter six by drawing on ideas by critical social theorists namely, Foucault and Habermas. This chapter explores in detail some of the



philosophical considerations underpinning the design of research in this area for those working with older people using social care services and suggests how to use methods that complement narrative approaches with documentary analysis in order to develop a systems approach. By considering the pros and cons of discourse analysis in research design, we may be able to take a more critical stance and find ways of identifying the rhetoric and realities important to the understanding of researching learning in later life for marginalised populations.

Chapter **nine** begins to focus in on the implications of the book themes so far for professional training and practice and speaks directly to practitioners in social work, social care and other community support providers to uncover ways in which learning might be recognised, valued and promoted in their day-to-day practice. These will be related to learning theories, interventions and the design of care pathways which include opportunities for assessing, recording, monitoring and evaluating learning needs which support the achievement of improved outcomes for older people. The chapter will also consider how the curriculum and user involvement in professional education can foster co-production and the implementation of person-centred support.

The concluding **chapter ten** will pull some of the key themes from the book together and start to reflect on some of the implications for future practice, policy and research with older people. It will draw on some of findings from the voices of older people through my own research and consultation as well as reflections in different settings around the issue of lifelong learning in social care.